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The Baptism of Existentialism

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Richard Alden Swanson  
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## Preface

This thesis is on a subject very near and dear to my heart. It is not a highly academic work in the sense of using tomes of references--neither is it academic in the sense of adding any new hypothesis to the already huge field of existential theology.

For the past three years here in Cambridge I have been attempting to come to a deeper knowledge of the Gospel once delivered to the saints. For the past two years I have been very much concerned with the present situation in which the Church finds herself. I am convinced that the Gospel must be expressed in new and different ways if it is to make any kind of sense to "modern man" as the theologians define him.

This thesis embodies the conclusions which I find satisfactory for the beginning of such a restatement. I make no claims to their "orthodoxy", but only submit that this is the direction my thoughts have taken over the last two years. Although they may not be too profound, I find that my conception of the Gospel has considerably widened in the course of this study.

The two main parts of this thesis are both concerned with existentialism and its possible use in the respective areas of Gospel restatement in contemporary language, and in understanding the meaning of history from a Christian perspective.

## INTRODUCTION

To say that people do not think the way they used to would be a truism. But yet the Church is accused of preaching the same doctrines in the same way as St. Paul did on that day in Athens. We all would admit that the Church must hold true to the doctrines set forth in Scripture (at least as Protestants), but I think we would agree also that as human language and thought patterns change the theology of the church must change. This is only simple apologetics.

We live in the twentieth century. We must set forth the Gospel in twentieth century language. How do we do it? That is the subject of this thesis. From the earliest days the method of presenting Christ has varied according to situation in life of man. This is evident in the New Testament itself--with marked tendencies towards Hellenistic philosophy creeping into the original Hebrew ways of thought.

Since the rise of science mankind has crossed a boundary which has separated us forever from world view of the ancients. But yet that world view provides the means for expressing the salvation in Christ which He wills for all men. To the extent, then, that the primitive world view is a stumbling block to understanding the Gospel--to that extent we must find a new way of expressing the truth of the same Gospel in contemporary language.

Unfortunately Bonhoeffer did not live long enough to explain what he meant by "religionless Christianity". If he had a great many problems might have been solved, as there is no doubt that today modern man is looking for a faith that is of this world and which he can at least relate to his empirical knowledge of his world.

Both theologians and philosophers have been very concerned with providing us today means whereby we can experience and know both ourselves and the world around us. Both the existentialists and the linguistic analysts have provided us with methods of coming to a new understanding of the faith, and of late Paul Van Buren has offered us what he considers to be even another way of rethinking the Gospel message.<sup>1</sup> It is certainly beyond the scope of one thesis to comment on all the ways which have been presented to us.

What we will do, therefore, in the first section of this paper is to look at the merits of the existential approach to Gospel restatement as portrayed by Bultmann. As an introduction to existential interpretation we shall first summarize the philosophic background leading up to Bultmann (section 1); we shall then comment on Bultmann's hermeneutical, anthropological, and philosophical pre-suppositions (section 2); Bultmann's original essay (section 3) will then be discussed; a criticism of Bultmann's essay will follow (section 4); and finally we will make some concluding observations (section 5).

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1. Paul Van Buren, The Secular Meaning of the Gospel, MacMillan, New York, 1963.

## 1 THE BACKGROUND

The purpose of this essay is primarily to set forth the theological concepts of Bultmann, and to attempt to make some judgment on his contribution to contemporary theological discussion. At the present time, however, this is certainly more difficult to do than it would be for either classical or medieval theologians, as it has only been some twenty years since Bultmann's epoch making New Testament and Mythology has been circulating in theological circles; the resulting dialogue is still very much with us today, and, indeed, it looks as though it will be with us for some time to come. As with most of the ideas of men, Bultmann's attempt at restating the Kerygma is only now beginning to really provoke more than the usual amount of uproar exhibited over any new theological work--men seem to be inherently slow in realizing the implications of their thinking.

Since the first publication of the work in 1941, and revision in 1948 as Kerygma and Myth, Bultmann's essay has perhaps influenced more contemporary theologians than any other work, with the possible exception of Barth's new type of supernaturalism. It is therefore necessary to come to grips with Bultmann's treatment of New Testament exegesis based on his existentialist interpretation of the Word. The question to be examined in the following pages is simply this--is existential philosophy a valid method of interpretation for the Gospel, or is Bultmann on the wrong track?



The development of theology from the time of Augustine to the present is fantastically complex. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to go into any detail whatever. Rather I will make some broad (and unproven) generalizations hoping that they will show that the development from Neo-Platonic thought to Bultmann does indeed make some sense in the light of the accompanying rise of the empirical scientific method. In fact, the case is that the scientific method was always at least one leap ahead of the theological reinterpretation.

From the time of Augustine onwards, through Anselm and Abelard, the stress in theology shows more and more the stress on reason rather than the subordination of man as in Augustine. By the time of Anselm, Western man was once again coming into intellectual contact with pagan neighbors, this time primarily Muslims in Spain. A dialogue started which was to sweep Neo-Platonism from the scene of Western theology. As intellectualism developed, however, it brought two problems with it. The first of these is the question of how much to trust in reason, and secondly, to what extent must natural theology precede faith? If Christianity was to hold its own, some interpretation of the Gospel must be found which would appeal to both intellectual Christians and their pagan neighbors. The appeal to faith and authority of the Church were obviously no good to someone who would accept neither.

Thomas Aquinas solved this problem in the transfer of the mode of Christian interpretation to an Aristotelian basis. All during this period though, scientific developments forced the church constantly to be ready to defend the catholic doctrine against both pagans and "scientists". In keeping with the development of medieval science, Christianity was rendered acceptable to the scholars by the Aristotelian synthesis which stressed above all the theory of human intelligence.<sup>1</sup>

Both Dawson and Pirenne point to the rise of the middle class as the key to the new economic and political order which eventually resulted in the rise of the Protestant powers as state-churches. Liberty, equality, and democracy assumed not merely the status of political ends, but also religious ideals. Christianity had been broken into many fragments, never again to form politically the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church. Now, this event had a definite effect on both science and theology. Because of the stress on liberty and freedom of speech and thought, scientific method flourished and men demanded religious liberty from the Church's dogma. Unfortunately, later the freedom given by these new states jelled into a mass of inflexibility which in places like Geneva was to put an end to all scientific freedom, as well as religious.

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1. Christopher Dawson, Medieval Essays, Image Books, New York, 1954.

By the time of Kant (1724-1804) science had made a tremendous impact on culture and had caused two theological viewpoints to arise. The first of these is exemplified by Spinoza (1632-1677), and the second by Hume (1711-1777). Both the Catholic and Protestant theologies had their rise before the big surge of empirical science. A fundamental conflict now arose between religion and science which is still evident today, and is the indirect cause for Bultmann's concern. Spinoza resolved this conflict by making a religion out of science.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Hume retained the established theological interpretations but found they were not grounded on adequate evidence; this type of resolution, therefore, ended in skepticism or agnosticism. Again, the rise of science was the cause of both these interpretations of religion. On the one hand was the mathematical emphasis, on the other, the empirical; on the one hand the affirmation of the truths of religion, on the other the denial.

Kant changed the whole picture. By his ethical idealism which assumed that there is no valid metaphysical knowledge he changed religion into a devotion to moral duty. "God must be what man's moral insight demands that he be; if not, he is no God."<sup>2</sup>

Again in the nineteenth century, science challenged

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1. Edwin A. Burtt, Types of Religious Philosophy, Harpers, New York, 1939, p. 170. I am indebted to Burtt for most of this historical summary in this section.

2. Ibid, p. 237.

the old orthodox theology, and as usual forced a choice between two alternatives. This time Liberalism was the result of the denial (on empirical grounds) of the orthodox truths. What was really significant was combined with science to produce a Christian theology on a more enduring basis. In many ways this movement cut across denominational lines and represented a group of theologies, rather than any one definite logically consistent philosophy. We may therefore (according to Burt) separate the Liberal position into the conservatives (the modernists) and the radicals (the humanists) and distinguish between them on many of the issues such as the place of Jesus as the base of moral teaching, which the modernists would accept and the humanists deny. Although many of the Liberals do not follow Schleiermacher, nevertheless he is perhaps the one most typical of the general type of religious philosophy of the group. For Schleiermacher, religion consists of a feeling of dependence which gives rise to a highly subjective (by our standards) type of thought. This is important to remember, as later we shall see that Bultmann is accused of the same religious subjectivism. Schleiermacher asserts that,

"The conceptions (dogma) that underlie these propositions are, like your conceptions from experience, nothing but general expressions for definite feelings. They are not necessary for religion itself, scarcely even for communicating religion, but reflection requires and creates them. Miracle, inspiration, revelation, supernatural intimations, much piety can be had without the need of any one of these conceptions." 1

1. Friedrich Schleiermacher, On Religion, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1958, p. 87.

The last stage of theology is the result of the world situation of the twentieth century. It is almost fantastic to see how big a transition in theological thinking has come about in the last fifty years. The period of Liberal theology came to a screeching halt early in the twentieth century by the sudden realization by humanity first, and then by theology, that the world was not the fine place they had imagined.

Again, empiricism was at least the indirect result of this final stage of thought which developed into either a "realized" empirical denial of metaphysics or the attempt to turn theology into an existential philosophy. Where fifty years ago our grandparents were facing the future with optimism, we now face the world with much fear and trembling. In the fields of politics and economics there has been a radical change of thought from the days of the Liberals--this cannot but help be reflected in theology which now emphasizes the transcendental approach (at least in the Barthian corners). The difference between Hume and modern man is profound. Whereas Hume regarded traditional Christian metaphysics with skepticism, skepticism today involves basic human values and the Christian faith as a whole, and not just the metaphysics behind some theological dogma.

It is in the face of such skepticism that Bultmann first proposed his now widely controversial solution to the Entmythologisierung problem.

How do we interpret the Kerygma? This is a hermeneutical problem solved in different ways by different men, depending on the presuppositions of each. One thing we do know--that every New Testament scholar has some hermeneutical method. It may involve a "blik" that rests on naturalism, idealism, or existentialism. Now Bultmann's hermeneutical method is demythologizing.<sup>1</sup> As John Macquarrie has pointed out, however, demythologizing is more restricted a hermeneutical method than pure existentialism.<sup>2</sup> Demythologizing can only be directed towards those parts of the Bible that contain "myth" as Bultmann defines it. Obviously there is a great amount of material (such as narrative and ethical teaching) that cannot be classified as myth. Such material is not examined by Bultmann, therefore, in his method. Demythologizing, therefore, apparently involves a more radical approach than pure existentialism, as it maintains a skeptical attitude towards any objective understanding of myth. It is based not on simple existentialism, but on a world view which denies the possibility of the kind of events portrayed objectively by myth. It therefore seems to be a combination of existentialism and modern science. As we shall see later the resulting "subjectivism" resulting from Bultmann's hermeneutic subjects Bultmann to much criticism from the theological "right". It is important to remember,

1. Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, p. 45.

2. John Macquarrie, The Scope of Demythologizing, Harper's New York, 1960, p. 17ff.

however, that existential interpretation in itself makes no pronouncement concerning the facts of the story which it interprets. Demythologizing makes the addition of eliminating objective mythological language.

### B. Anthropology

Bultmann seems to derive his ideas about the nature of man via Dilthey and Collingwood. He sees man as the essential factor in history, and distinguishes sharply the natural and human sciences. Man is given priority in his understanding of history. Like Dilthey, Bultmann goes back to Schleiermacher for his concern with the problem of interpretation of the place of man in the world. Like Dilthey, also, Bultmann understands history to be understood in terms of itself and of the human cultural life which it reveals. We will return to Bultmann's understanding of history in the second part of this thesis when the problem of meaning in history is discussed. Again Bultmann is accused of subjectivity in basing his theological system on man (soteriology) rather than God (Christology). Whether the charge is true or not is debatable, but it is true Bultmann has a tendency to start his thought process from the side of man, as he claims that "modern man" thinks in this way.

### C. Philosophy

Of primary concern is the philosophic understanding of the theologian. And in this category Bultmann has

received the most radical criticism from both the right and the left. We later will take up the question of Bultmann's "inconsistency". At present let us look at Bultmann's position as belonging to that general type of thought known as existentialism.

As we have seen, existentialism is the basis both for Bultmann's hermeneutics and anthropology. It is his "blik" for his view of reality. The question then of the possible use of existentialism as a means of interpreting the Gospel becomes primary. For if existentialism cannot be used with good result Bultmann's method is doomed from the outset. Against this charge Bultmann responds with vigor!

It is Bultmann's contention that, in point of fact, existentialism is the only philosophical basis that will serve as an adequate basis for a statement of the faith. His whole work as a New Testament scholar is based on this assumption, as well as his work as a theologian. And one must admit, whether one agrees with him or not, he does bring new light to New Testament interpretation--specially in areas such as the Fourth Gospel.

The criticism of Bultmann which rests on the assertion that his demythologizing is to be condemned because it rests on philosophy should be completely disregarded. From the time of Justin on theology and philosophy have gone hand in hand. There never has been a time when philosophy and theology have been completely unrelated. This is not to



say, however, that danger is never present in the misuse of philosophy in theology. Macquarrie points out three common dangers with regard to philosophy corrupting theology. They are first the danger of over-emphasis of philosophy at the expense of theology; secondly, the danger that foreign ideas may creep into theology from philosophy under disguise; and lastly, that theology may become purely the accommodation of Christianity to contemporary philosophy.<sup>1</sup>

If properly used, however, philosophy can become a great apologetic support. It all depends on whether the individual philosophy in question has the same "blik" as the traditional formations of Christianity in the Bible and primitive church. Actually existentialism is a very flexible philosophy, and can be found in the atheism of Sarte, the Catholicism of Marcel, the Protestantism of Kierkegaard, the Judaism of Buber, or the Orthodoxy of Berdyaev.<sup>2</sup> Like most contemporary philosophies, existentialism has its roots in the Christian tradition. Bultmann claims to find it in the New Testament.

This assertion of Bultmann's is really the crux of the issue. If we can show that the presuppositions and preliminary understanding of man's existence in the Bible are similar to those advocated by Bultmann, the charges against him of selling out the faith must be dropped.

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1. Macquarrie, An Existentialist Theology, MacMillan, New York, 1955, p. 4.

2. Ibid, p. 16.

Existentialism as a type of thought stresses the difference between the individual being of man (Existenz) and the being of objects in nature (Vorhandenheit).

Is there any affinity between this understanding of existence and the understanding in the New Testament? Is it ridiculous to speak of existentialism in the New Testament?

Bultmann asserts that his brand of existentialism is that found in Biblical thought.

"Thus it follows that existentialist philosophy can offer adequate conceptions for the interpretation of the Bible, since the interpretation of the Bible is concerned with the understanding of existence" 1

Bultmann's conviction is that you must have the right philosophy before you can have the right theology, and that existentialism is the right philosophy as it is that philosophy of existence found in Biblical thought.

Macquarrie supports Bultmann's claims for existential theology.

"...existentialism...is not merely a phenomenon of modern times. It appears rather to be one of the basic types of thought that has appeared from time to time in the history of philosophy." 2

Macquarrie traces existentialism in theology from Augustine through the late Middle Ages, Pascal, Kierkegaard, and Bultmann.<sup>3</sup>

In conclusion, there appears to be no valid reason

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1. Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, p. 57.

2. Macquarrie, An Existentialist Theology, p. 17.

3. Ibid, p. 16.

for ruling out existentialism as a possible means of interpreting the Gospel. In fact we declare a limited acceptance of existentialism! Before accepting too much, however, we must stop for a moment and defend Bultmann (if he can be defended) against charges from the "right" that he has succumbed to the first of Macquarrie's dangers of importing philosophy into theological matters--that of over-emphasizing the similarity between Biblical thought and Heidegger's existential philosophy.

#### D. Bultmann and Heidegger

Barth has remarked,

"Bultmann is an exegete...but...he is also a systematic theologian of such a stamp, that there is scarcely a text in the handling of which there do not become apparent certain axioms of his thinking of so dominating a character that absolutely everything depends on the question of their validity." <sup>1</sup>

While this may or may not be the case (Bultmann denies the charge) the fact remains that Bultmann conceivably may be too narrow minded as his philosophy is derived almost exclusively from one man--Heidegger.

What is the relationship between Bultmann and Heidegger? As Bultmann admits, "In doing so (his historical-critical method) the work of existential philosophy, which I came to know through my discussion with Martin

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1. Barth, Dogmatik, III 2, p. 534, quoted in Ian Henderson, Myth in the New Testament, SCM Press, 1952, p. 21.

Heidegger, has become of decisive significance for me."<sup>1</sup>  
 Bultmann admits that his theology is very similar to the philosophy of Heidegger, and has even asked himself whether Heidegger's philosophy, by its very resemblance to a Christian theology based on revelation, does not implicitly claim to have superseded the former.<sup>2</sup>

On anthropological grounds Bultmann and Heidegger are very close, in fact so close that some critics have claimed there is no difference in their treatment of man as a fallen being--this criticism I think Bultmann correctly denies. To get an idea of the similar elements of Bultmann's theology as in the New Testament and Mythology as compared with Heidegger's Sein und Zeit, it will be instructive merely to list various anthropological similarities.

1. The response to God must be that of the individual.
2. Man is a fallen creature (although Heidegger believes that man can pull himself up by his own power while Bultmann denies any chance of that).
3. There is a call for decision, to answer the existentiell, individual, question. Upon the answer depends man's self-realization.
4. Man's temporal existence is of a fleeting nature.
5. Man's life is terminated by death, and each man knows this to be true individually. This is what separates persons from things.
6. The Jesus of history is subordinated in Bultmann's case to the preaching of the Kerygma. There is thus an implied negation of objective history.

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1. Rudolf Bultmann, Existence & Faith, Meridian Books, 1960, p. 288.

2. Henderson, Myth, p. 21.

While it is true that the above characteristics may be found in the work of Bultmann and Heidegger, it does not follow that as a result Bultmann loses the Kerygma by interpreting it in existential patterns. He may have lost the Kerygma on other grounds as we shall see in a minute, but there is nothing in the above statements that is essentially not Christian.

Now, as Henderson has clearly shown, Heidegger's philosophy is an ontology (a study of the nature of being) which is a branch of metaphysics. In this philosophy Heidegger distinguishes carefully between the being of man (Dasein) and the being of objects (Vorhandenheit). The element that distinguishes the two categories is this-- man knows his existence and this gives its distinctive quality. "Knowledge of our being is thus an integral part of that being. It follows that a change in our understanding of our being is a real change in our being."<sup>1</sup> Now this is precisely the point where Bultmann takes over and substitutes Christian categories for those of Heidegger, with almost, but not quite the same meaning. By the intervention of Christ into the life of the Christian and his existential acceptance of that event, the life of the Christian is changed from a fallen life to a resurrected life. Bultmann then sets up the parallel with Heidegger

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1. Henderson, Myth, p. 27.

as follows; for Heidegger man has inauthentic existence until he makes the decision, then he has authentic existence; for Bultmann, man without Christ has inauthentic existence (although he does not use quite the same terminology) while man with Christ has authentic existence. While many critics claim that in the above parallelism Bultmann introduces foreign philosophy into the Kerygma, there does not seem to be much support for such criticism.

In the preceeding section we have stated and commented upon Bultmann's hermeneutical, anthropological, and philosophical presuppositions of his existential approach to exegesis. We have noted that existentialism has been used for many years as an aid to exegesis, and there seems to be little danger that the Kerygma is destroyed by its use. The fact that Bultmann derives much of his method from Heidegger is no logical reason for disclaiming this method. The fact remains that although Bultmann does admit that he comes very close to Heidegger's analysis of being, on many essential points (such as the nature of man's fallenness) he does not accept Heidegger for reasons he sees in the Kerygma itself.

Every theologian has his method. Bultmann's is the radical kind of existentialism which has come to be called demythologization.

We now turn to the third section of this paper in which we will review Bultmann's proposal itself.

## 3) BULTMANN'S THESIS

Bultmann begins his epoch making essay with the assertion that the cosmology of the New Testament is essentially mythical in character.<sup>1</sup> He then goes on also to claim that the event of Jesus Christ is also stated in mythical terms, and that both the cosmology of the New Testament and the event of Jesus Christ must be demythologized if the Kerygma is to mean anything to contemporary man. The Kerygma as it was written was in a mythological language that modern science has now proven false. To the extent that Christianity is expressed today in the form of Gnostic redemption myths--to that extent, "the kerygma is incredible to modern man, for he is convinced that the mythical view of the world is obsolete."<sup>2</sup> Bultmann goes on to assert,

"...there is nothing specifically Christian in the mythical view of the world as such. It is simply the cosmology of a pre-scientific age...and it is no longer possible for anyone seriously to hold the New Testament view of the world--in fact, there is no one who does." <sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, Bultmann holds that the concept of original sin is absurd as well as the doctrine of atonement.

What are we to do, then? Bultmann insists that for the Kerygma to speak to man today the whole thing must

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1. Rudolf Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1961, p. 1.

2. Ibid, p. 3.

3. Ibid, p. 4.

be drastically purged (demythologized) of all of this outdated mythology. "If the truth of the New Testament proclamation is to be preserved, the only way is to demythologize it."<sup>1</sup> In the essay, Bultmann then goes on to show that myth is really the attempt of man to understand himself, and that the actual contradictions in the New Testament itself (the Virgin birth, Christ's pre-existence etc.) render the whole situation hopeless to modern man unless something is done.

So far, Bultmann is not unlike the Liberal theologians of the nineteenth century who were described in the first section of this thesis as modernists and humanists. Bultmann, however, does not adopt the method of dealing with the cosmological elements of the Kerygma of the Liberal theologians, as they actually eliminated the mythological instead of interpreting it, and therefore lost the Kerygma. We must remember that Bultmann claims that his method of demythologizing the Kerygma does not eliminate the Kerygma with the myth, but rather seeks to explain both.

Secondly, the Liberals ignored the event of Christianity. But, the crucial point is this; the "criterion adopted (to provide an understanding of the

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1. Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, p. 10.



New Testament) must be taken not from modern thought, but from the understanding of human existence which the New Testament itself enshrines."<sup>1</sup>

We thus arrive at the point we left a short while ago. As Bultmann has put it,

"So we are still left with the question whether this event and the person of Jesus, both of which are described in the New Testament in mythological terms, are nothing more than mythology. Can the Kerygma be interpreted apart from mythology? Can we recover the truth of the Kerygma for men who do not think in mythological terms without forfeiting its character as kerygma?" <sup>2</sup>

As we have already seen, Bultmann claims the existentialist interpretation is the only possible solution. He claims this on the grounds that the New Testament was written by men seeking meaning for their own existence, and, furthermore, as additional proof for the validity of this method of exegesis, Bultmann supports the contention that the New Testament interpreted itself existentially. The realized eschatology in the Johannine writings is sufficient evidence (for Bultmann) that the interpretation intended by the contributors of the New Testament was designed to be existential to start with!

By this time it should have become obvious that Bultmann uses the term, "eschatology" in a different way

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1. Ibid, p. 12.

2. Ibid, p. 15.

than meaning the doctrine of the end. Bultmann uses "eschatology" when he means the here and now--in other words the Christ event caused the fore-shortening of the end so the end is here now for all who make the decision for Christ and thereby gain that understanding which gives life and not death to the individual. "So to exist is already to exist eschatologically, and Bultmann claims that demythologizing has already begun in the New Testament."<sup>1</sup>

Bultmann's treatment of the crucifixion and resurrection provide typical cases of the way Bultmann uses the existential approach to demythologize the Christ event. He starts out, "Now it is beyond question that the New Testament presents the event of Jesus Christ in mythical terms."<sup>2</sup> Bultmann admits, however, that this myth is different from the others (a point upon which he is later criticised) in that it is a combination of history and myth. As usual, he asks if all the mythological language is not simply an attempt to express the meaning of the historical figure of Jesus as a figure and event of salvation. He comes to the conclusion that it is, after stressing the impossibility of a physical resurrection. In any case, Bultmann argues that the resurrection is certainly not a proof of the redemptive efficacy of the cross, as this

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1. Henderson, p. 16.

2. Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, p. 34.

would be using one article of faith to prove another. Rather, the resurrection is the realized eschatological event and meets the man in faith today as well as two thousand years ago. The historical importance of the resurrection is not stressed; in fact Bultmann maintains that the historical resurrection is unknown to us today as it was unknown to the first century Christians--we meet the risen Lord in the Kerygma, that which is preached. "Christ meets us in the word of preaching as one crucified and risen. He meets us in the word of preaching and nowhere else. The faith of Easter is just this--faith in the word of preaching."<sup>1</sup> On the basis of this radical assertion it would seem that Bultmann's method of exegesis is to be interpreted ontologically rather than cosmologically.

The evidence shown in the preceeding section on the use by Bultmann of Heidegger's ontology can be utilized now. Recall for a moment the difference between the being of man (Dasein) and the being of objects (Vorhandenheit). The crux of the problem, claims Bultmann, is that the cosmological interpretation of the universe as three-storied is an example of the confusion of the two categories of existence. The existential decision of the Dasein is couched in the spacial relations of the Vorhanden.

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1. Ibid, p. 41.

With that comment we conclude our remarks concerning Bultmann's thesis. Doubtless there is much more that might be said, but in the interest of conciseness we now move on to the fourth section of this commentary on Bultmann's use of existentialism in his demythologizing. So far we have seen the background leading to Bultmann (section 1); we have examined several of Bultmann's basic assumptions in his exegesis (section 2); and we have briefly touched his original thesis (section 3). In the fourth section we shall see some of the criticisms which have been made of Bultmann's method from both the theological "right" and "left".

#### 4) CRITICISMS OF BULTMANN'S ENTMYTHOLOGISIERUNG

##### A. Preliminaries

When Bultmann's essay came out in 1941 there were immediate reactions, some favorable and some decidedly unfavorable. Needless to say, some of the criticisms are valid and some show a complete lack of understanding of what Bultmann is trying to say. Because he does use the existentialist ontological categories though, it is not an easy task at times to be sure of what Bultmann is trying to say. That, combined with the obvious problem of our lack of historical perspective on Bultmann's work, does cause much difficulty--difficulty both in assessing the value of Bultmann's contribution in theological circles, and of judging his effect (if any) on "modern man".

Fortunately, Bultmann, in answering his critics over the last twenty years has clarified his position to a great extent. In the series of lectures given here in the United States in 1951 and published under the title, Jesus Christ and Mythology, Bultmann makes an attempt to synthesize his existential interpretation and to answer his critics. This is a two-way proposition though, and his position is modified as a result of the criticisms that have been directed against his oftentimes radical method of exposition in the New Testament and Mythology. Also, one should never forget that the demythologizing area is only one part of Bultmann's work as a New Testament scholar. To the extent that his existentialist interpretation is his chief hermeneutical device though, the demythologizing controversy must be taken seriously, as Bultmann's concept of eschatology is only understood on the grounds of his existential approach.

#### B. Criticisms from the "right".

As could be predicted, the chief criticism centers on the question of whether or not the existentialist philosophy is a valid hermeneutical and anthropological interpretation of the New Testament. Can Bultmann get rid of myth without getting rid of the Kerygma, and if so, is the whole thing a worth while enterprise? These are certainly valid questions, and the answers to them will

determine whether he is forcing the New Testament thought into categories which destroy the meaning. We have seen that the Liberal theologians, by "demythologizing" the Gospel did destroy the essential nature of the Word; does Bultmann do the same thing?

From the critics on the right we usually hear cries of "subjectivism" ringing across the theological wastes. Merely by using the existential approach to the Scriptures Bultmann has been accused of radical subjectivity. He is criticized both in his parallelism to Heidegger and in his alleged undermining of the historical element in the Kerygma. For the present we will delay discussing Bultmann's concept of history until the second part of this thesis, as that part is about history and meaning in history.

We must, however, say a few words about the criticism from the right, that Bultmann has denied the once-for-all nature of the faith, as no portrayal of the "right" would be complete without acknowledging their historical criticism.

Both Schniewind, Thielicke, and Barth claim that Bultmann has destroyed the once-for-all nature of Christianity.<sup>1</sup> Bultmann's treatment of the crucifixion and resurrection specially comes under fire. Because of the stress on the eschatological here and now,

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1. Burton Throckmorton, The New Testament and Mythology, Westminster Press, 1958, p. 47.

Bultmann in effect severs the Kerygma from its roots and makes it a completely subjective enterprise. Thieliicke writes,

"Is New Testament history only a vague reality standing behind Christian experience which is scarcely recoverable as it really occurred, or is it an event quite distinct from our experience? Is it not the miraculous appearance of the light which shines whether or no the darkness apprehends it?" 1

Bultmann stresses the present reality of the Word as the saving event. Schleiermacher affirms, however,

"...the distinction between what is known in remembrance and what is known in existence is false; that there is no genuine existence independent from memory, for the former is essential to the latter." 2

Likewise Barth claims that the theologian must confront the past as well as the future, and that in eliminating the bodily resurrection Bultmann is losing an essential element in the Kerygma.<sup>3</sup> Of all Bultmann's critics on the theological "right", Barth (as might be expected) seems to have the most to say. His criticism is total.

Barth criticizes Bultmann both on the historical level and the philosophical. In the first place, claims Barth, Bultmann does not believe that the Kerygma presents man as a "completely new" creation, but that Christ is

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1. Throckmorton, p. 48.

2. Ibid, p. 49.

3. Gustaf Wingren, Theology in Conflict, Muhlenberg Press, 1958, p. xx.

only the historical occasion through which man's natural self-understanding is conveyed.<sup>1</sup> Barth thinks that Bultmann does not present the Christ-event as an event significant in itself. This criticism apparently is based on Barth's firm conviction that the characteristic Reformation stress on Christology is replaced by Bultmann by a subjective soteriology. But then we must remember that according to Barth, Biblical hermeneutics must be unique, and can have to traffic with a general method of interpretation.<sup>2</sup> It is no shock to Barth's audience, then, when he comes to the conclusion that Bultmann represents a throwback to the Liberal tradition.

Barth tries to show that in claiming the event of Christ is indispensable to the Kerygma, Bultmann for once breaks out of the existential approach and for once tells the truth. Bultmann is therefore inconsistent. This charge of inconsistency is an important one, as it comes both from the theological "right" and "left".

Paul Althaus takes the position of Barth to a great degree. He, too, accuses Bultmann of forsaking the New Testament Christology and bringing in a false subjectivism through Bultmann's soteriology.<sup>3</sup> Althaus finds it impossible

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1. Schubert Ogden, Christ without Myth, Harper & Bros., New York, 1961, p. 101.

2. Ibid, p. 104.

3. Paul Althaus, Fact and Faith in the Kerygma of Today, Muhlenberg Press, 1959, p. 80.



to separate the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. To the extent that Bultmann tries to do this very thing he is inconsistent, as one can not (in the same breath) separate the Jesus of history from the Christ of faith and still assert the historical "givenness" of the Christ event.

Bultmann writes, regarding the relationship between myth and history,

In its redemptive aspect the cross of Christ is no mere mythical event, but a historic (geschichtlich) fact originating in the historical (historisch) event which is the crucifixion of Jesus...In the last resort mythological language is only a medium for conveying the significance of the historical (historisch) event." 1

Brunner's criticism that Bultmann eliminates myth would therefore seem to be unfounded, if we understand what Bultmann is really doing.<sup>2</sup> As we have already said, Bultmann does not eliminate myth, but rather explains its historical significance.

Brunner's criticism that Bultmann confuses the difference between myth and primitive science may be more to the point.<sup>3</sup> Brunner accuses Bultmann of cleansing the message of the New Testament from,

"...ideas which necessarily belong to it, and do not conflict with the modern view of the world at all, but

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1. Bultmann, Kerygma and Myth, p. 37.

2. Emil Brunner, The Christian Doctrine of Creation and Redemption, Westminster, 1952, p. 268.

3. Ibid, p. 267.

only with the "self-understanding", and in particular with the prejudices, of an Idealistic philosophy." 1

He sees Bultmann as continuing the old Liberalism.

This line of thinking is very close to Macquarrie's when he shows that Bultmann's notion of "modernity" may be fallacious.<sup>2</sup> Macquarrie refers to Karl Jasper's criticism of Bultmann's conception of modernity, and shows that,

"...it is Bultmann's preoccupation with a certain idea of modernity rather than his concern with Heidegger's existentialism that gives to the theology of demythologizing its apparently negative character." 3

Bultmann fails to distinguish between two separate things.

There is a modern picture of the world (scientific), and there is also a modern self-understanding which may have nothing to do with the Bible--which in fact differs completely from that of the Bible. The scientific knowledge of the world must take precedence over the Biblical three-storied universe if we all are not to become schizophrenics.

But the modern self understanding, which has nothing to do with science, rests upon one's philosophical view of the place of man in the world. This is a "blik", an orientation, a commitment to see reality in a certain way, which has nothing to do with science.<sup>4</sup> Now it is clear that Bultmann's commitment to existentialism is his "blik",

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1. Brunner, p. 267.

2. Macquarrie, The Scope, p. 232 ff.

3. Ibid, p. 233.

4. Van Buren, The Secular Meaning, p. 87.

just as Hegel's "blik" was to "Liberalism", and Augustine's to neo-Platonism. The crucial question then becomes, as we have seen, what was the "blik" of the Biblical sources? Bultmann claims it was existentialism. But his critics from the "right" certainly deny unanimously that demythologizing has any place in New Testament exegesis, at least as Bultmann understands it!

Before concluding our discussion of criticism directed against Bultmann from the theological "right", let us briefly acknowledge the charge that Heidegger's philosophy is not a proper carrier for the Kerygma. What can we say about the use of Heidegger's philosophy?

For example, Bultmann asserts,

"No one can take another's place, since every man must die his own death. In loneliness every man realizes his existence." <sup>1</sup>

As Wingren has clearly shown, this type of thought is completely dependent on Heidegger's treatment of death. Human existence for Heidegger is "being for death" which is the same concept Bultmann uses for his treatment of the resurrection.<sup>2</sup>

"If we extend the redemptive work of the gospel to include death also, assuming an "act of God" which breaks the power of sin, the whole analysis of existence by Heidegger breaks down." <sup>3</sup>

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1. Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, p. 56.

2. Wingren, p. 54.

3. Ibid.

Another type of criticism directed against Bultmann is that he claims to use the philosophical categories of Heidegger in a different and Christian way, but in reality means the same thing as Heidegger, or, is just plain wrong in believing that Heidegger's existentialism can be used as a vehicle for the Kerygma. Henderson points to several areas of possible controversy.

Henderson mentions Bultmann's stress on the decision as found in Heidegger. But, yet, asks Henderson,

"...it is doubtful if the Christian can give to decision quite the same pre-eminence that it has in the existentialist scheme of things. Does one, for instance, become a Christian by one's own decision?" 1

Henderson asserts the real place where Bultmann is unduly influenced by Heidegger is in his assumption that all mythology must be interpreted existentially.

"It is the assumption, namely, that the only way God acts on us is by getting us to alter our conception of ourselves. I see no reason for making it." 2

Likewise, Bultmann has been accused of being too close to Heidegger in his understanding of the fallenness of man. Many critics feel that by accepting Heidegger's idea of fallenness (man can get out, once he realizes he is fallen) Bultmann moves away from the Christian position (man can not get out, once he realizes he is fallen, except by grace).

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1. Henderson, p. 34.

2. Ibid, p. 30-1.

On the other hand, Bultmann claims that he is dealing with another type of question (distinguished by different words in German) and therefore Heidegger does not influence him in a harmful way. Henderson neatly phrases an answer, perhaps not necessarily the right one. But it is worth considering.

"...the philosopher is dealing with what is ontological, with the structure of being--in this instance of Dasein--as such. On the other hand the New Testament interpreter and the Christian in general are dealing with what is ontic, a particular side of the being of Dasein, namely, a man's relations with God. There is no point in calling the philosopher an atheist. In so far as his philosophy sticks to the ontological he is not concerned with God but only with the abstract question of the nature of being as such. On the other hand, the New Testament interpreter has to keep in touch with him because only he can tell what the real possibilities of Dasein are, and we do not summon men to a real decision unless we present them with real possibilities to choose between." 1

We thus conclude our discussion of the criticisms of Bultmann from the "right". We have noticed that the two most oft repeated charges are that Bultmann's idea of history and his emphasis on soteriology tend to make the Kerygma highly subjective, and that Bultmann follows the existentialist philosophy of Heidegger too much, again to the detriment of the Kerygma. Above all, there is a radical inconsistency in Bultmann's thought.

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1. Henderson, p. 38.

C. Criticisms from the "left".

From what has already been said one might suspect that Bultmann was a radical with little or no following. This is not the case. In fact (believe it or not) in the eyes of some contemporary theologians Bultmann is a conservative who has some good ideas, but who never carries them out to their logical ending. From the "left" also come cries of inconsistency on the part of Bultmann. With so many apparently after his scalp one begins to wonder after a bit of thought just what Bultmann is trying to do. He already has provoked more excitement than any other theologian in this century, perhaps with the exception of Barth.

The "left" position does not have as many followers as the "right", however, but their claims are equally harsh on Bultmann. Both Fritz Buri and Karl Jaspers lead the attack on Bultman from the "left" in the areas of theology and philosophy respectively.

Macquarrie approvingly quotes Barth's description of Buri as "an uninhibited radicalizing of Bultmann's radicalism".<sup>1</sup> One does not have to read very much of Buri to get precisely this picture. It is beyond the scope of this theses to discuss the whole of Buri's criticism of Bultmann, so we will confine ourselves to

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1. Macquarrie, The Scope, p. 131.

those points in which Buri sharply disagrees with Bultmann's interpretation of the Kerygma.

Briefly, Buri accuses Bultmann of logical inconsistency. He claims that once Bultmann has committed himself to demythologizing the New Testament he fails to carry out this commitment by suddenly appealing to some historical "once givenness", and draws a line at how much of the Gospel can be demythologized. He apparently sees no hope for Bultmann as long as Bultmann insists on some objective happening as the basis of self-realization. Buri's thought may be partially explained if one realizes that for him there is no essential difference between philosophy and theology (contra Henderson, p. 33). Any appeal, therefore, by a theologian to an objective event as the basis of faith does not hold much water.

As an alternative to Bultmann's inconsistent demythologizing Buri offers us a thorough-going dekerygmatising which eliminates the last trace of the offensive objectivity in the Gospel.<sup>1</sup> He bluntly states that salvation has nothing to do with any once-for-all event. For Buri the value of the New Testament is that it gives expression to authentic existence via mythical thoughts. Authentic existence is quite independent of the New Testament however. For Buri, like Jaspers (from whom Buri receives

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1. Macquarrie, The Scope, p. 136.

his philosophy) conceives the greatest sin of all to be that of particularity. There is thus no "scandal" of the Gospel at all for them, as the Gospel does not express anything that is not inherent in man's situation. Grace is not needed. Man, by realizing his fallenness, can pull himself up into authentic existence completely outside Christianity.

Whatever is said about Buri's theology, it is clear that it is not Christian in the strict sense of the word. By assuming that philosophy and theology are the same thing Buri completely destroys the once-for-all nature of the Kerygma which even Bultmann affirms. The result of Buri's dekerygmatising is a theistic humanism. It is interesting to note in passing that the result of Buri's work is very similar to the results of the linguistic analysts. For both Buri and Van Buren, God becomes a value that is psychological. Van Buren holds that the validity of a theological statement can be verified by the action of the believer, and Buri thinks of the New Testament as a unique mythology which brings about self-realized authentic existence. In both cases Christianity is dissolved into a philosophy of existence.

Schubert Ogden, in this country, typifies the same type of thought as Buri. In his book, Christ without Myth, Ogden directs some sharp criticisms in Bultmann's direction.



Ogden claims that there has been so much criticism of Bultmann from both the "right" and "left" that we must judge Bultmann's solution inadequate.<sup>1</sup> As with Buri, Ogden's main criticism is that Bultmann has not taken his demythologizing to its logical end. By refusing to demythologize the Kerygma, Bultmann neither does justice to modern man's picture of the world nor to the Kerygma itself. There is no half-way--either Bultmann must carry his method to its logical conclusion or give up the method entirely. Ogden lays down two ground rules for interpreting the Faith, as depicted by Bultmann.<sup>2</sup>

1. "Christian faith is to be interpreted exhaustively and without remainder as man's original possibility of authentic historical existence as this is more or less adequately clarified and conceptualized by an appropriate philosophical analysis."

2. "Christian faith is actually realizable...only because of the particular historical event Jesus of Nazareth..."

Ogden points out that the two affirmations are mutually exclusive, and cannot by any stretch of the imagination be combined. Ogden then rewords both propositions to make it clear that Christian faith is simply the real possibility for every man of authentic existence as defined by Heidegger.

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1. Ogden, p. 96..

2. Ibid, p. 112.

One must smile when Van Buren then finds fault with Ogden's rewording of Bultmann's two propositions. According to Van Buren Ogden does not solve the problem either, because "modern man" does not understand the meaning of "God" in the first place.<sup>1</sup> Van Buren approaches the meaning of "God" from the position of linguistic analysis, but one may question how much light he sheds on the situation!

Perhaps the best part of Ogden's commentary is that he clearly sees the crucial question Bultmann remains a bit hazy on. Ogden asserts that "the claim of philosophy that the true nature of man can be discovered and known apart from the New Testament is not to be disputed."<sup>2</sup>

The real issue is, however, whether Christian understanding of existence, which admittedly can be known apart from Christ, can also be realized apart from him. Here is the primary issue between theology and philosophy.<sup>3</sup>

Bultmann, of course, answers "no", while Buri and Ogden (and Jaspers) answer "yes". But this is only because Bultmann differs with the philosophers on the character of man's fallenness as we have seen. From a Christian point of view, Ogden does not realize that even the attempt to escape from fallenness is a fallen act.

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1. Van Buren, p. 78.

2. Ogden, p. 71.

3. Ibid, p. 72.

Before concluding our discussion of theologians on the "left" let us briefly consider for a moment the objections raised against Bultmann by Karl Jaspers.

As we have seen, Jaspers has had a strong affect on Buri, so some of Jasper's thinking comes through in Buri's theology. By nature, however, Jaspers is a philosopher of a somewhat liberal ilk. Being such, he naturally criticizes Bultmann for his insistence that authentic existence can only be realized in Christ.<sup>1</sup> Jaspers thinks that Bultmann is too narrow minded--in his almost total basis of Heidegger, in his selective New Testament exegesis of the Bible, and in his selective understanding of revelation as being unique in Christ.<sup>2</sup>

The questions raised by Jaspers are difficult ones with which to deal. They involve the old argument of particularism versus universalism. As Christians in the twentieth century we must not say that the only way to God is through Christ. But yet we must not think (as does Toynbee) that Christianity is only one among many valid approaches to God. This is what Jaspers seems to advocate--that all roads lead to the same destination. Bultmann is therefore right in insisting that the concreteness of the revelation in Christ must not be sacrificed to a liberalistic type of thought.

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1. Macquarrie, The Scone, p. 156.

2. Ibid, p. 162.

We have now concluded our discussion of Bultmann's thesis viewed both from the theological "right" and "left". We have noticed that the charges on the right for the most part accuse Bultmann of selling out the faith to an existential philosophy by his subjective treatment of the historical "objectivity" of the Kerygma. From the left come charges that Bultmann has, in fact, not done what he intended to do--to purge the Kerygma of all mythology offensive to "modern man". Buri, Ogden, and Jaspers all think of Bultmann as being just another "orthodox" theologian who cannot escape the narrow mindedness of thinking of the Christ event as being uniquely determinative of authentic existence.

Both sides charge Bultmann with inconsistency. While Bultmann denies this charge one cannot take lightly the opinion of so many learned men from both sides. There doubtless is some ambiguity in Bultmann's thought. But this must not discourage us from taking a good long look at Bultmann's proposal before rejecting it, for if we reject Bultmann we had better have another system of thought to substitute in his place. It is just possible that the issues may not be all "black" or "white", and that Bultmann is pointing to a paradox which is in the heart of the Gospel. Just as we must reject Barth's extreme objectivism, so too we must reject Buri's substitution of a philosophy of existence for the Kerygma.

Bultmann claims he is not eliminating the essential scandal of the Gospel at all, but is eliminating the stumbling block caused by the presentation in myth of the Saving Event. Bultmann seems, therefore, to fully realize that the Gospel can never be explained in fully rational terms.

We might suggest that Bultmann's critics on both sides consider the use of paradox put forth by D. M. Baillie.<sup>1</sup> It is our opinion that only by holding in tension the transcendence--imminence, objective--subjective, and metaphysical--anthropological elements in the Gospel that will we remain true to all sides of the Faith.

##### 5) CONCLUDING REMARKS--WHAT THEN OF BULTMANN?

What can we say in conclusion regarding Bultmann's proposal? Bultmann is not trying to explain God. Quite the contrary. He assures us that demythologizing makes clear the true meaning of God's mystery. "The incomprehensibility of God lies not in the sphere of theoretical thought but in the sphere of personal existence."<sup>2</sup> Bultmann is also quite ready to admit that faith must always seek new forms of expression, and that, "in our age faith has not yet found adequate forms of expression."<sup>3</sup> He urges others to join the search for a meaningful way

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1. D. M. Baillie, God was in Christ, Faber & Faber, London, 1961, pp. 106-24.

2. Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, p. 43.

3. Ibid, p. 83.

of interpreting the Kerygma.

But, is it possible to formulate a perfect philosophical system? Bultmann answers,

"At this point we must realize that there will never be a right philosophy in the sense of an absolutely perfect system, a philosophy which could give answers to all questions and clear up all riddles of human existence. Our question today is simply, which philosophy offers the most adequate perspective and conceptions for understanding human existence." 1

Bultmann finds the most adequate perspective offered by the existential approach, as its chief object is the understanding of existence--the personal existence of the individual. And, as we have seen, Bultmann believes that this existential approach is justified on the grounds that the New Testament was written with the anthropological and hermeneutical views of the existential ontology.

Thus, although reserve judgment on whether Bultmann does or does not destroy the essential character of the Kerygma must be our final answer, the one thing that Bultmann has done is to show how clearly the secular world has parted from the assumptions of the Faith. The time has passed when the Church lead world culture. The time has passed when the Church even had much influence over secular life--soon the time may come when the Church has no influence at all. While Bultmann may be wrong in his attempt to tie the Kerygma to existentialism,

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1. Bultmann, Jesus Christ and Mythology, p. 55.

while he may be wrong in his lack of stress on Christianity as a historical act, it is certain that he is right in his emphasis of the fact that to the extent that Christianity offers answers to the real meaning of life, to that extent will people listen to what the Church has to say.

In the last chapter of Jesus Christ and Mythology Bultmann very effectively answers many of the charges of his critics in the chapter entitled, "The Meaning of God as Acting". In this short essay (which shows the difference twenty years can make) he denies that to speak of God as acting is falling into mythical speech, and therefore he is consistent in interpretation of the New Testament.

The claim that Bultmann leaves with each of us is simply this:

"Christian faith is not concerned with these experiences of a distant past. On the contrary, when the Resurrection is preached to the man of to-day, it summons him here and now to be crucified with Christ by renouncing all claims to find security in the visible and the this-worldly and thereby to rise with Christ--again here and now--to what is his own real existence."<sup>1</sup>

We thus conclude our study of Bultmann and his contribution to contemporary theological discussion, and the first of two parts of this thesis. We now turn to

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1. Henderson, p. 20.

the second topic of discussion--that of coming to an understanding of a Christian philosophy of history.

With the shift in emphasis during the last fifty years away from metaphysics to history, the whole relationship of Christianity to history has assumed great importance. The classic Christian doctrines, such as christological and trinitarian statements, were drawn up by the church fathers who generally thought in Platonic metaphysics.

With the decay of metaphysics through the rise of modern science and empirical thinking, history has taken on increased significance. Modern man, as understood by Bultmann and Van Buren, does not understand Platonic metaphysics. Modern man wants a faith of this world, in the sense that it does not call upon him to deny the findings of contemporary science.

History has replaced metaphysics as the matrix in which modern man comes to his self-awareness. But yet there is great amount of confusion as to the nature of history. What is it? How does it relate to Christianity? What is the Christian approach to history?

These are the questions we now turn to in Part II of this thesis.



## PART II

In a sense the last part of this thesis singles out one of the many smaller discussions within the demythologizing debate. We have seen that Bultmann has been criticized from the "right" with regard to his view of history in the Kerygma. He has been accused of introducing radical subjectivism by placing stress on the fact that Christ comes to us today through preaching, through the retelling of the Christ event which opens the way for authentic existence.

Bultmann has thus raised the question of the place of history in Christianity--what is the relationship between history and faith? And, as Christians, can we see any meaning in history as it confronts us existentially? In Part II we will try to arrive at a satisfactory understanding of history that might appeal to modern man. We therefore leave the theoretical discussion of history in Part I and turn to a more practical approach.

Our method of approach will be the same as in Part I. We will first briefly review some of the highpoints in the development of a Christian understanding of history (section 1). We then will take up the question of methodology and look at several views of history, concluding with Bultmann's historical hermeneutics (section 2). The third section will discuss rationality in history--can history provide its own meaning? (section 3).

After concluding that history cannot provide its own meaning, we shall then approach history from a Christian perspective and conclude that the sovereignty of God and the Christian doctrine of providence provide a meaning in history for the life of the individual Christian (section 4). The last section is a justification of providence and a practical application of Bultmann's historical method as a statement of faith (section 5).

# 1) STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM AND ITS HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

## A. The Problem.

In a sermon delivered by Paul Tillich during the last world war to a group of soldiers, the following observations were made:

"The idea of God seemed to be impossible, because the reality of our world seems to be in opposition to the all-mighty power of a wise and righteous God.

What answer shall we give, what answer can we give to such a crucial problem--a problem in which Christianity as a whole is at stake..." 1

Tillich, in those few words, brought to mind one of the most pressing problems for the Christian theologian today. It is the unanswered question of contemporary culture in its quest for meaning in history.

At the present time philosophers are much engaged

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1. Paul Tillich, The Shaking of the Foundations, Scribner's Sons, New York, 1948, p. 105.

with this question about the essence and meaning of history. At least part of the reason for this concern with the meaning of history is that in contemporary thought man has attained great prominence. Bultmann, in his Gifford Lectures (History and Eschatology), points out that it is certainly no new observation that the life of man is interwoven with the course of history. But he thinks that today world events have made men much more conscious of their finitude and helplessness, and therefore the search for security embodies the quest for historical meaning.

The reason that man's answer to the question of philosophy of history is so important is simply this-- that his view of history will be in a large part his view of himself and how he fits in the historical pattern. If we are to deny the growing nihilism of secular culture, we must first see clearly man's self understanding before any remedy may be prescribed. It is for this reason that Butterfield says,

"One of the most fundamental of the differences between people must be the question whether they believe in God or not, for on that depends their whole interpretation of the universe and of history... Those who think that they are sitting on the fence are entirely deluding themselves." 1

So we see that this question is one that cannot be

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1. Herbert Butterfield, Christianity and History, Scribner's Sons, New York, 1950, p. 113.

postponed until more favorable conditions arise. If we are to find a Christian interpretation of history we must do some extensive rethinking of the early and classical Christian philosophies of history. But yet before we start we must heed a warning...

"If men have found no philosophy or religion in their cultural experience of life, it can hardly be claimed that the academic study of history--the mere concrete study of the workings of events--will itself provide the remedy, or that the attempt to learn more scientifically when things happened or how they happened can solve the whole problem of human destiny..." 1

Evidently then, there is a limit to how much we can learn from history. Just where that limit is we shall attempt to discover in the following pages.

#### B. The Background.

Contemplation of history has always been a part of man--specially so in the Hebrew and Greek cultures. There is some kind of primitive philosophy of history in the book of Job. Since Job's time, however, historical thinking has changed somewhat. Until the twentieth century, philosophy of history was considered to be part of religion. It was the concern of the gods. Since the Renaissance though, ideas of history have increasingly taken a secular twist, until many persons of the nihilistic or positivistic type of thought would deny outright that the term "philosophy of history" has any meaning.

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1. Butterfield, p. 31.

Since 313 Christianity has had to affirm the world in some sense, and the faith has had to live in the world. But from the time of Augustine Christians have been warned that the City of Man is far different from the City of God.

With Thomas Aquinas a Christian philosophy of history developed on the basis of Aristotelian thought, which was far more conducive to historical thought than the neo-Platonism of Augustine in which history was somewhat unreal. Man was now a free, rational, and moral agent, master of his destiny and responsible for the course of human events. Helped by this down to earth thought of Aquinas, the man of the middle ages underwent a change of mind towards the world--embodied in such persons as St. Francis and Fra Angelico. Human history began to take on a much more significant meaning in the totality of history. But the idea of a philosophy of history was still the old moral view--goodness was rewarded and evil punished by an omnipotent God who judged all men from heaven.

The rise of science, however, brought an end to this type of thinking, at least with some men. God's ways now became hidden. No longer were the lightening bolts means of punishment used by an angry God to chastise sinful persons. In the writings of Voltaire one can almost see the old moral view of history passing from sight. As the value placed on human reason began to grow, the Christian hope of an afterlife began to change to a hope of secular progress. Human progress displaces providence as the ruler of the world.

Shinn finds three general interpretations of history which have been developed in Western thought.<sup>1</sup> The first of these is a belief which finds the meaning of life in escape from history. This type of thought seems to be best illustrated by Idealist philosophy in the West and Buddhism in the East.

The second interpretation is the belief that history creates and exhausts its own meaning. Both Augustine in City of God and more recently Niebuhr in Faith and History deny this idea of history, primarily as it is seen in basing one's historical meaning on the life of the state.

In contrast to both the foregoing, the Christian belief is that history derives its meaning from a transcendent God. We will return to this view later.

Before moving on to discuss the present methodology in historical studies, it is worthwhile to note the general trend in historical thought in the last fifty years. We have already seen that from the Renaissance on, modern thought has centered more and more about man's inherent reason. During the period of liberal thought last century, the Hegelian system defined history in optimistic terms of thesis--antithesis--synthesis resulting ultimately in a theory of progress when Hegel's absolute idealism became

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1. Roger Shinn, Christianity and the Problem of History, Scribner's Sons, New York, 1953, p. 33 ff.

secularized by Marx. Marx went too far.

Within the last fifty years the optimism has given way to pessimism and a much more realistic outlook. History is no longer judged by ideals, but by facts. Movement in thought is away from the great synthesis such as in Hegel to a more limited scope and a more modest claim by the historian, as well as by the philosopher. With this movement towards a more limited area of work also goes a change in emphasis from substance to process. This is clearly seen in the change in emphasis in philosophy from metaphysics to logical positivism, or, of late, to linguistic analysis. Any discussion of a contemporary philosophy of history, must, of necessity, take into consideration the new outlook.

Perhaps the most significant change in historical thought is in the movement from an "objective" historical approach to an "existential" approach. Along with this goes the change in emphasis from substance to process--the process of becoming. With the divorce of both theology and philosophy from metaphysics and the resulting marriage of them to existentialism the way lies open to reinterpret history in a way that will make sense to modern man. Implicit in this statement is the assumption that existentialism is a good vehicle for transmitting Christian faith in general, and a Christian understanding of history in particular. As we have seen in our survey

in Part I, there is every reason to assume that existentialism does provide a vehicle for transmitting the Gospel. Of course there is the danger pointed to by the critics on the "right" that theology will get lost in philosophy, but that is a danger present in any relationship between theology and philosophy, and not particular to existentialism.

## 2) HISTORICAL METHODOLOGY

In this section we will first look at some definitions and distinctions in vocabulary, then briefly refer to several different approaches to history, and finally comment on Bultmann's historical methodology.

### A. Some Definitions and Distinctions in Vocabulary.

The term "history" is notoriously slippery. To make a long story short, the only meaningful way of using the term today is to restrict the word only to that period of time in which man has been active. We will use the word "process" to refer to those natural events in which man has no part. This distinction is important. Human history had a beginning, but there is no conclusive evidence that the cosmic process ever had a beginning.

M. C. D'Arcy makes a very useful distinction between history (which he conceives to be a scientific study) and historicism, which deals with history as a whole,



almost from a metaphysical view.<sup>1</sup> Whereas the historian looks at part of the picture and analyzes, the historicist, or philosopher of history, looks at the whole and synthesizes. The historicist is not limited to the scientific view which of necessity the historian must take. What the historicist loses in thoroughness of detail he makes up for by seeing relations and interconnections beyond the scope of the historian. The philosopher of history may use art forms, poetry, myth, or symbols to express himself. When Toynbee is criticized, for example, it is more likely to be in his synthesis and view of historical reality than in his detailed study of comparative cultures.

In a sense, however, all men are philosophers of history. We all like to make vast historical generalizations about historical events. Deep down within us there is an inkling that there is a meaning behind it all. As we have just noted, however, the present climate of opinion is against the historicist, as his metaphysical basis of reality has been denied by both positivists and existentialists.

#### B. Several Approaches to History

We now turn to the actual hermeneutical question.

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1. M. C. D'Arcy, The Meaning and Matter of History, Meridian Books, New York, 1961, p. 63.

How do we understand historical documents delivered by tradition? In asking this question we enter the area of Bultmann's work as both exegete and theologian.<sup>1</sup>

As Bultmann points out, every interpretation of history presupposes a certain method of approach. Too often, however, the historian is unaware of his bias and thinks his work is pure objectivity. Bultmann follows Schleiermacher and Dilthey in holding that the interpreter of history has to reproduce in himself the incident out of which the work which he has to interpret grew.

"Hence it is evident that each interpretation is guided by a certain interest, by a certain putting of the question: What is my interest in interpreting the documents? Which question directs me to approach the text? It is evident that...a particular understanding of the matter is presupposed. I like to call this a pre-understanding." 2

Bultmann here is applying to history the same method he uses in theological exegesis. Before pursuing this line of thought further, let us pause for the moment and consider three ways in which history may be approached.<sup>3</sup>

#### 1. The Scientific approach.

The first method is the child of modern man. Macquarrie uses for his example of this approach Ernst

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1. Rudolph Bultmann, History and Eschatology, Harper Torchbooks, New York, 1957, pp. 110 ff.

2. Ibid, 113.

3. Macquarrie, The Scope, pp. 65-95.

Troeltsch, who "stoutly maintained the scientific character of historical investigation". The result of this method is that the study of history can only yield probable results. The price which history pays for becoming a science is that its findings, like those of science, must always be open for future revision and are therefore only probable. The probability of truth may be high in some historical traditions, or low in others. Troeltsch also, in his assertion of causality, prohibited irruptions or interventions in history of a divine nature.

The question of vital importance, however, is not can history be approached from a scientific method, but rather whether history, in so far as it is scientific, can help to confirm or destroy the historical claims of Christianity.

Can the scientific method confirm the claims of Christianity? It evidently cannot. For if the element of probability is present every Christian historical claim must be left open to future discoveries. Secondly, the events which are on the same plane of history as other empirically verifiable events are not those which the Faith finds determinative. For instance one might reach a probable conclusion that a baby was born on December 25th some two thousand years ago, but the conclusion that faith draws (that this was the Incarnation) lies beyond the reach of scientific history. If the

Incarnation is to be part of the system of Christian belief it must be based on something other than pure historical research.

Can scientific historical studies destroy the claims made by faith? Bultmann answers no, for the same reason that history cannot prove many of the "historical" claims made by the Faith. As far back as David Strauss (who came to many negative conclusions in other areas) it has been held that to base the faith on the latest findings of historical scholarship is impossible, for the scholars and certainly for the laymen.

## 2. The metaphysical approach.

The metaphysical approach to history is probably the oldest. As we have seen (section 1) both the Hebrews and Greeks had some conception of history in relation to reality as a whole. The metaphysical approach exhibits history as a whole and in relation to the totality of reality. This is the tradition Christian theologians inherited from their second cousins, the Greek philosophers. From Augustine to Hegel the metaphysical approach was probably the one most frequently used. With Hegel, however, the great Christian metaphysical systems came to an end. At the present time Toynbee is writing as a historicist, but he acknowledges the scientific view as developed by Collingwood and others.

Today the metaphysical view is no longer held to be

valid by present historians of the positivistic and existential schools of thought. We now know that it is impossible to pronounce on history from some omniscient view , as we are all involved in history. From Schleiermacher through Dilthey through Troeltsch we have been told that we can understand history only through our own participation in it. The failure of the metaphysical view to satisfy the demands of historical knowledge leads us to the existential view developed by Heidegger and Bultmann.

### 3. The existential view.

Neither the scientific nor the metaphysical approaches to history is of much help in trying to assess what the meaning of history may be from a Christian perspective. If we are to elucidate a meaning in history, we will have to set up the problem and discuss it in terms with which twentieth century man is familiar. But this is just what Bultmann claims to have done with his existential approach to history. In it Bultmann relates history to the historical existence of the historian himself, thus eliminating the problem of the metaphysical view.

As Bultmann is a good example of the existential approach to history, we conclude the second section of Part II by watching how Bultmann approaches the historical problem using the existence of the historian as a basis.

### C. Bultmann's Historical Methodology.

Bultmann offers us a restatement of what the historical claims of Christianity may mean in an age of secularism. His thought may be summarized under four main headings.

1. From Dilthey and Troeltsch, Bultmann arrives at the thesis that historical reflection has for its subject matter the acts of man in the world. We have previously seen the necessity for this in distinguishing between history and process.

2. Again via Dilthey and Collingwood, Bultmann holds that in historical reflection the historian consciously or unconsciously must participate in the object of his reflection. It is in this assertion that Bultmann lays himself open to the charge of subjectivism. We must now digress for a moment and consider the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity in history.

We have seen that Bultmann claims that history must be approached with certain questions which vary according to the historian. For instance Hegel asks different questions of history than does Collingwood, and obviously as a result they come to differing conclusions about historical development and historical cause.

Now if we admit that the historian must participate in the object of his study, then we would seem to lay ourselves open to the charge of historical subjectivity.

This is but an echo of the same charge which is leveled against the whole existential type of thought with the historian participating in the object of his reflection. There is some truth to the charge. Naturally one sees history from his own position in life. We have seen that the metaphysical approach was inadequate because it rested more on the historians "blik" than on history itself. The existential approach, therefore, does not make such a large claim to know reality as the metaphysical, because historians and theologians of the existential school such as Bultmann realize to begin with that their historical reporting is always colored by their pre-understanding. In this sense, subjectivity, if we wish to call it that, is unavoidable.

Probably the best known exponent of the historical "objective" thinking is Barth. It is well known that Barth wishes to see the atoning event of faith quite apart from any existential relation to that event. On the other hand, Bultmann does not think that:

"...history is sufficiently seen when it is only seen as a field of such events and actions as can be fixed in space and time." 1

Bultmann asks if historical objectivity is at all possible. Bultmann goes on to at least partially solve this problem

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1. Bultmann, History and Eschatology, p. 116.

by showing the relationship between historical subjectivity and objectivity.

"Truth becomes manifest objectively to each viewpoint. The subjectivity of the historian does not mean that he sees wrongly, but that he has chosen a special viewpoint, that his research starts with a special question. To this extent the subjectivity of the historian is a necessary factor of objective historical knowledge." <sup>1</sup>

Subject and object are therefore inseparably bound up with each other. A historical event must both happen objectively and then be interpreted by man before it has meaning.

Dispite Bultmann's contention, however, we must agree with Barth that Christianity must not lose its firm roots in the "once-for-allness" of the Event. Barth may be right in being wary of any historical hermeneutics which places the subjective emphasis of "what does it mean to me" in place of Jesus of Nazareth. Both objective and subjective elements are in any historical situation, as an objective event means nothing until some interpretation is given to it. It is doubtful if there is any such thing as "objective" interpretation though.

We now return to Bultmann's existential approach. We have seen so far that Bultmann sees historical reflection as having for its subject matter acts of men

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1. Bultmann, History and Eschatology, p. 118-9.



in the world, and that the historian participates in the object of his reflection.

3. The function of historical study is to provide for man's self understanding. Here the real existential approach comes through. Bultmann defines this self understanding in terms of radical freedom which would free man from himself.

"Christian faith believes that it receives this gift of freedom, by which man becomes free from himself in order to gain himself. 'Whoever will save his life shall lose it, but whoever will lose his life shall find it.' Just this is the meaning of the Christian message." 1

4. In keeping with point three, Bultmann sees historical reflection as concerned primarily with possibility.

"Man is always on the way; each present hour is questioned and challenged by its future. ...the real essence of all that man does and undertakes in his present becomes revealed only in the future as important or vain, as fulfilment or failure. All actions are risks."2

Here is where Bultmann owes much to Heidegger. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to open this question, however, as at the present we are only interested in what contribution Bultmann makes in a Christian understanding of history. We emphasize, however, that with all Bultmann's stress on the future, there is no implied severing of the link with factuality and pastness. Bultmann merely puts

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1. Bultmann, History and Eschatology, p. 151. It is interesting to note that this emphasis on "freedom" in Christ may be the seed from which Van Buren derives his notion of faith as "contagious freedom".

2. Ibid, p. 140.

the stress on the present acceptance of the preaching of the word. For Bultmann the meaning of history always lies in the present.<sup>1</sup>

Like the scientific and metaphysical approaches, the existential approach contributes to a Christian understanding of history. It would seem that at the present time the existential approach ultimately (and within limits) provides the right direction for future study. There has always been great truth in this approach, and it is certainly far from being a new approach to history. As developed by Heidegger and Bultmann it has the possibility of providing a secular understanding of man in history, which may be used within limits by theology in explaining the Gospel. The danger seems to be that which Barth clearly sees--that we must not lose track of the factual history which is the basis of the present "realization" of the Gospel. Even Collingwood insisted on the necessity of the reality of the historical Jesus. We have noted previously that Christianity must not be subject to the whims of historical research in matters of faith. At the same time we must remember that this does not imply that we ignore the objective-historical altogether. But in any case, as Macquarrie points out, there is a minimal core of historical factuality which

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1. Bultmann, History and Eschatology, p. 154.

cannot reasonably be doubted.<sup>1</sup> Bultmann's more conservative students (such as Bornkamm) are also moving in the direction of placing more stress on the person of Jesus as portrayed through the gospel accounts.

With this we end the discussion of methodology in historical study. We have made some semantic distinctions (section A); we have commented on several approaches to historical study (section B); and finally, we have given a conditioned acceptance to Bultmann's historical hermeneutics (section C).

Before continuing with Bultmann's historical approach, and seeing if we can elucidate a meaning in history on the basis of the existential approach (which we will do in sections 4 and 5) we must first digress for a moment to assert that history has no meaning in itself.

### 3) RATIONALITY IN HISTORY--THE MEANING OF HISTORY

Is there a meaning of history which is rationally comprehended by all men? It would seem not. Almost unanimously interpreters of history, whether Christian or atheist have found no meaning in the course of actual events. The atheistic thinkers have gone on to deny the Christian concept of Providence as a result, and most

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1. Macquarrie, The Scope, p. 98.

Christians have been left stammering over the problem of theodicy. Shinn points out,

"History has no immanent rationale, no simple coherence or unity, no inherent and autonomous meaning. The very term, philosophy of history is dubious." 1

At first glimpse this seems like a rather negative conclusion for a Christian historian and theologian. But, however, and this is important for understanding our definitions, the distinction lies in the preposition "of" rather than "in". This may seem like a trivial point, but in actuality the greatest differences follow. When we say meaning of history we refer to the process of history itself, remembering that we mean the history of man. When we refer to the meaning in history we refer to some specific event or idea in history which gives meaning to the whole. For the present we confine ourselves to the meaning of history, or trying to find the meaning of history from rationality or natural reason. In the next section we shall take up the question of a Christian meaning in history.

Karl Lowith has this to say about rationality in historical approach:

"The problem of history as a whole is unanswerable within its own perspective. Historical processes as such do not bear the least evidence of a comprehensive and ultimate meaning. History as such has no outcome. There never has been and never will be an immanent solution of the problem of history." 2

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1. Shinn, p. 199.

2. Karl Lowith, Meaning in History, U. of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1949, quoted in Shinn, p. 202.

Such a view of despair is bound to be the case when one looks at history to provide its own meaning. All of man's systems, from Augustine to Hegel thus fall under judgment. History itself is incapable of providing meaning no matter how classified. Perhaps the most insidious form of trying to find meaning in history is modern man's notion that "the belief that historical development is a redemptive process."<sup>1</sup>

There never has been any purpose in history which has been sufficiently obvious to convince any large number of people. Like a glass of water full of various microbes, history conceals more than it reveals. Butterfield well sums up the situation by saying,

"I do not think that any man can ever arrive at his interpretation of the human drama by merely casting his eye over the course of the centuries in the way that a student of history might do. I am unable to see how a man can find the hand of God in secular history, unless he has first found that he has an assurance of it in his personal experience."<sup>2</sup>

It would appear, then, that the human intellect is incapable of finding a meaning of history on its own initiative. Rationality as a means of finding historical meaning simply will not do.

"The Christian Gospel as the final answer to the problems of both individual life and man's total history is not proved to be true by rational analysis. Its acceptance is an achievement of faith, being an apprehension of truth beyond the limits of reason."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Niebuhr, Faith and History, Scribner's, New York, 1949, p. 2.

2. Butterfield, p. 107

3. Op. cit., p. 151.

We conclude that there is no meaning of history, when approached from a purely rational point of view. The natural process as such offers us no clue to a Christian understanding of history. If we feel that the human intellect is supreme, we will look for a rationalistic meaning of history. When we realize as Christians that God is supreme we stop trying to force history into a preconceived mold and acknowledge before God our partial sight in His rule of the world.

So far, we have said little about a possible Christian view of history. What has been said so far could have been said by B. Russell, or anyone with positivistic leanings. There is little in existentialism proper which commends itself to Christianity--Sarte uses the same basic methodology as Bultmann, so there must be some missing ingredient of what we fondly like to call a Christian view of history.

#### 4) FAITH IN HISTORY--THE MEANING IN HISTORY.

There are few theologians who have maintained that secular history added up to God. Any meaning in history is furnished by looking at events through Christian eyes and from a Christian perspective. Up until now we have been discussing the possibility of historical meaning from a non-Christian point of view. Now we must attempt to come to some judgment as to the meaning of history

within the Christian framework of thought. The recent search for the meaning of history by secular historians and historicists seems to have ended in a thoroughgoing despair. What can be said for a Christian concept of history? It is this question that Tillich called a vital one of the faith.

In the last analysis the problem of history for faith is the problem of the sovereignty of God. Either God rules history or He does not--if He does there is some kind of order (whether perceived rationally or not) and if not there is chaos. The problem of understanding history, then, for the Christian, is one of understanding providence.

To this question we now turn in the last section of this thesis. We will first state the traditional doctrine of providence, and then offer an understanding that we think might be more acceptable to the twentieth century man--this reconstruction will be on the lines that Bultmann has suggested in his existential approach.

## 5) PROVIDENCE.

### A. The Doctrine of Providence.

Providence, traditionally, has been the view that human life is directed to a good and happy end by an all-seeing and all-powerful being. Needless to say,

Providence has fallen on hard times in the secular mind today. We have already commented on the fact that any irrationality cannot be tolerated, let alone the idea of Providence as found in the book of Job. The trouble is that many Christians still go about with the same idea that Job's friends had--that good is rewarded and evil punished. With such an understanding of Providence it is no wonder that the secular critics of the faith stand up and scream. They have a perfect right to do just that. For to the eyes of the man who sees reality, evil is not necessarily punished at all, and the cry of "why do the evil prosper" goes unheard. Unless, therefore, we as Christians can do a job on the doctrine of Providence and come up with something that makes sense the cause is lost. Certainly the sovereignty of God is not obvious in history--at least to non-Christian eyes. As Shinn pointedly says,

"If we would look at history as a whole...at the whole human race as a whole, we must grant that human experience has found about as much evidence for belief in demons and evil spirits as for belief in beneficent gods." 1

No matter how we define Providence we are still likely to run into serious difficulties. Providence certainly cannot be based on any theory of natural causality. That is precisely what put the doctrine in current disfavor. If a man (either "good" or "bad") is walking along a mountain path and is suddenly crushed by a huge boulder we had better not say it was an act

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1. Shinn, p. 250.



of Providence. We are just seeking for trouble if we do. Sooner or later the problem would be reduced to a problem of mental gymnastics, in which we tried to decide why the boulder just happened to drop just then, why the man happened to be walking by just then, etc. Furthermore, if God is not the causal agent in matters of detail it is difficult to see how He can be the decisive causal agent in matters of great import. In any case it is a matter of faith alone, and lies beyond the range of any rational proof or disproof. Perhaps the distinction must be between the certainty of the fact of Providence and the knowledge of any full blown theory.

God is not to be identified with the process of history in any providential view. We have already seen how this usually results in some kind of progress theme which is subtly un-Christian. God is rather to be identified with man's freedom. God in the Christian providential view allows man to make his free decision, but yet somehow guides the total plan to His end. History is far from fixed in advance though.

"When we look back upon the past we see things fixed and frozen as they happened, and they become rigid in our minds, so that we think they must always have been inevitable--we hardly imagine how anything else could have happened. But when we look to the future, while it is still fluid, we can hardly fail to realize its unspeakable liquidity. All things considered, I do not see why Christians should be shy of trusting in Providence... but we cannot make terms with it or demand that it give us either victory in war or exemption from cataclysm." 1

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1. Butterfield, pp 110-12.

The Christian concept of Providence makes three related and curious statements.

"(1) God's sovereignty is the ultimate power in the universe, and though it is defied by evil, nothing is beyond its scope. (2) God's sovereignty is hidden to mankind, discernible only by faith and then not as a clearly perceptible pattern. (3) God's sovereignty is strangely made manifest in the weakness of love which suffers violence from the forces of evil." 1

To faith, both the eschatological and dynamic strands of history are clues to the hidden meaning in history. The eschatological tells us that history's meaning can only be found in the Kingdom of God, and the dynamic tells us that history does move forward. Shinn summarizes, "There is meaning in historical progress, but progress is not the meaning."<sup>2</sup> Even to faith though, Providence works beneath a veil, it is like looking through a glass darkly at Him who someday we will see face to face.

The hint to a Christian justification of Providence was given in the third proposition above, and it is to this we now turn. We will now set forth an understanding of history which both Bultmann and Bonhoeffer have advocated, as being acceptable to contemporary man.

#### B. The Justification of Providence.

The Christian doctrine of Providence, as we have

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1. Shinn, p. 262.

2. Ibid, p. 265.

seen, cannot be an assertion of historical causality. Rather it is a statement of the faith, and cannot be proven or disproven from outside the standpoint of faith. It is part of Tillich's "theological circle", or it is one of Hare's "blik's". The doctrine of Providence is a way of saying that God's grace is sufficient to any occasion. Shinn is right in his third point. The sovereignty of God is indeed the power of the love of God. It is not the denial of evil. It is the power over evil. Evil can only destroy, it cannot create anything, including a meaning in history--only love can do that.

Brunner also witnesses to this fact. "The Christian picture of world history bears clearly the marks of a theology of the Cross."<sup>1</sup> The mode of redemption and the course of history had to be one of suffering and of victory through apparent defeat, for the disciple is not above his master.

D'Arcy is right, too, in finding in the cross the clue to meaning in history. And there is another man who has not missed the clue of the cross.

"To endure the cross is not a tragedy; it is the suffering which is the fruit of an exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ. When it comes, it is not an accident, but a necessity. It is not the sort of suffering which is inseparable from this mortal life, but the suffering which is an essential part of the specifically Christian life." <sup>2</sup>

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1. Emil Brunner, Dogmatics, Vol. III, Westminster, Philadelphia, 1960, p. 373.

2. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, MacMillan, New York, 1960, p. 78.

If this suffering is an essential part of life as Bonhoeffer makes it out to be, then it also should be the basis for any Christian idea of history.

D'Arcy draws a parallel of the Christian idea of historical meaning to King Alfred in Chesterton's poem, "The Ballad of the White Horse".<sup>1</sup> King Alfred is made to walk alone in the Wessex fields in complete dejection--hunted like a fox by the Danes. Suddenly he has a vision of the Mother of God, standing in a field of corn, and he asks her for help. The only answer she gives is,

"I say naught for thy comfort and naught for thy  
          heart's desire,  
      save that the sky grows darker and the sea  
          rises higher."

Despite the cheerlessness of the message, Alfred recognizes in it the sign of the cross, and again becomes hopeful.

We started Part II with a quotation from Tillich, and it is fitting we end it with one, for he too points the Christian idea of Providence in the direction of the cross--in the same existential terms that Bultmann uses. It is a rather long quotation, but Tillich, in his precise way, seems to have said exactly the right thing.

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1. D'Arcy, p. 196.

"...the content of the faith in Providence is this; when death rains from heaven as it does now, when cruelty wields power over nations and individuals as it does now, when hunger and persecution drive millions from place to place as they do now, and when prisons and slums all over the world distort the humanity of the bodies and souls of men as they do now--we can boast in that time, and just in that time, that even all of this cannot separate us from the love of God. Faith in divine Providence is the faith that nothing can prevent us from fulfilling the ultimate meaning of our existence. Providence means that there is a creative and saving possibility implied in every situation, which cannot be destroyed by an event." 1

If we are to find any meaning in history today, it must lie in the area of existential application of the Gospel to the problems of loneliness and frustration which all men feel--even in the twentieth century. What few positive results with which we have ended our attempt to find a Christian understanding of history all point in the direction of faith. Rational analysis alone is incapable of providing history with meaning.

Any Christian reinterpretation of the doctrine of Providence must begin with the relationship between the once-for-allness of the Cross and the secular life of man. While we are secular men, we are also Christians. As Christians the only meaning we will find in history is the meaning that Christ has given to it.

Although Bultmann's existential approach to theology and to history may be open to criticism,

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1. Tillich, p. 106.

the fact remains that Bultmann has contributed substantially to twentieth century theology. Tillich once remarked upon his arrival from Europe, that in Europe, Bultmann is the man who is now being read.

In the best sense, faith is a new understanding of personal existence, which meets us as the Word is preached. The Word is a concrete Word, it is Jesus Christ. Any understanding of history by secular man must be through the eyes of faith, for there is no other meaning--at least for the Christian.

We conclude, then, that the existential interpretation of theology and history provides a key to the secular man for "realizing" the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection, whether these benefits be called authentic existence or by any other name. For in the last analysis, as both Bultmann and Tillich see, the meaning of history and the meaning of existence are a unity.<sup>1</sup> Faith in Providence gives meaning to history.

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1. Paul Tillich, Systematic Theology, Vol. III, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1963, p. 348.

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